Lawrence Rogers: Legacy of the Point Adams Packing Company

By Barb Swanson

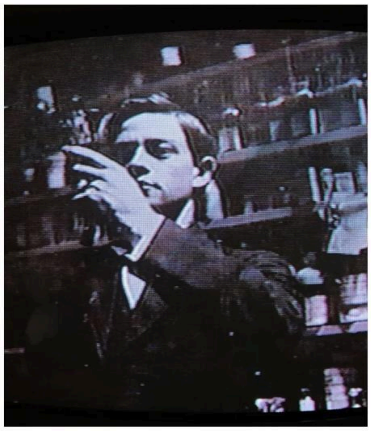
This is the story of an amazing man, Lawrence Rogers. He co-founded the Point Adams Packing Company in 1920 in Hammond, Oregon. He married in 1917 and raised three children in his Hammond home, all while running a successful business for over 40 years. The economy in the area was saved several times by Rogers and his partner, Ed Beard. Rogers also served as the first president of the Clatsop County Historical Society in 1945. The Clatsop County Historical Society now stores historical information concerning the early canneries in the area, which will help to tell this story.

Lawrence Rogers' Early Days

Lawrence Rogers grew up in Astoria, Oregon and graduated from high school there in 1914. He then acquired a degree in pharmacy from Oregon State University. Rogers became the co-owner of the Rogers and Son Drug Store in Astoria, which ran from 1869 to 1916. He helped run the drug store with his father, Charles Rogers, until going off to serve in World War I. When he returned, he practiced pharmacy until the cannery began.

After his father passed away, he inherited the pharmacy. He kept up his pharmacy license for 50 years, even after selling the business to start his cannery.

Fisheries Businesses near Astoria



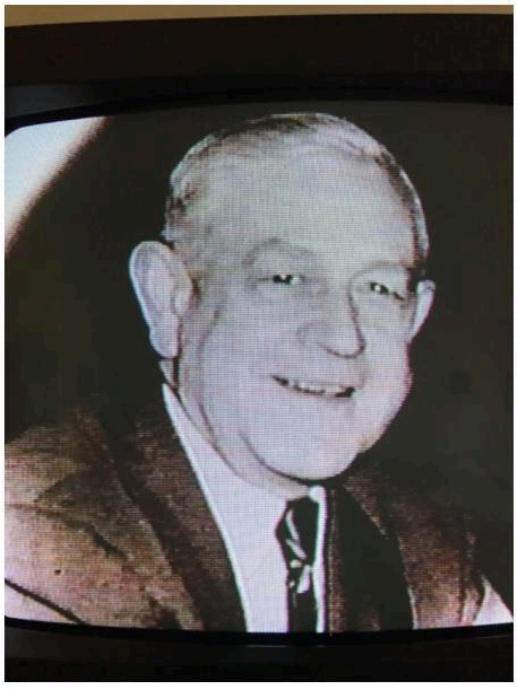
Lawrence Rogers is pictured as a young man working in the Astoria Pharmacy. Photo courtesy: Wally Rogers

In the summer of 1919, Rogers and Ed Beard were traveling between Astoria and Hammond. They both had been home from WWI for only a brief time. They were friends and started talking about business and fishing opportunities in the Astoria and Warrenton areas. Rogers and Beard then formed a plan to purchase a parcel of land in the Hammond area along the banks of the Columbia River and start a cannery there. Beard was very experienced in running a cannery, and Rogers knew a lot about sales and marketing strategies. Their vision

became a reality. The Point Adams Packing Company incorporated in 1920. Rogers served as president and Beard as vice president.

Rogers was also the manager in charge of sales and was instrumental in establishing a New York market. Through different brokerage firms, he was able to set up fish markets in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago.

The first salmon was received on June 11, 1920 from a trawler. The fish were pulled up with a hand line. The first year's pack consisted of 20,000 cases of 48 half-pound cans.



Lawrence Rogers co-founded the Point Adams Packing Company in 1920 in Hammond, Oregon. Photo courtesy: Greater Astoria Historical Society

Point Adams built several fish stations farther up the river for the gillnetters and their horses, who pulled the nets in with the fish. Fish traps were acquired but were prohibited in the 1930s.

One reason that the Point Adams Packing Company was so successful was that Rogers was very generous and kind with his fishermen. He always paid cash and even gave out turkeys at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Point Adams was the only cannery to pay in cash. He believed in taking time to show kindness and generosity to his work force.

Conditions at the cannery were good. The workers' skills and abilities were highly respected. They acquired over 200 employees and kept them on for years.

Salmon was hand packed until 1960. It was quality salmon from prime chinooks: 50-, 60- and even 70-pound fish.

Quality from Point Adams

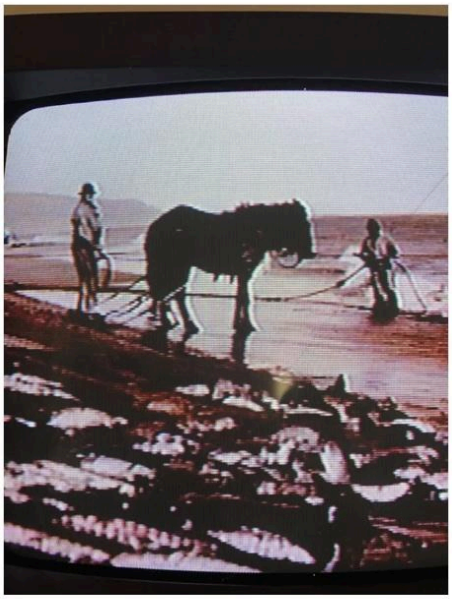
Point Adams prided itself on a quality product and was highly regarded for that quality. Their reputation grew. Beard inspected almost every can himself. Rogers and Beard

would sample and taste approximately a dozen cans of salmon almost every day for firmness and color.

With the acquisition of receiving stations and fish buyers, the need arose for cannery tenders and launches to haul the fish to the cannery. One example was the *Papco*, a boat built by Astoria Marine and Company. Nancy Rogers, Rogers' daughter, christened the *Papco* at age 11 on her fourth try, using a champagne bottle.

Charles Rogers, Rogers' son, supervised the packaging and shipping of all canned goods. "Personally Packed" was the slogan of Point Adams, and quality was the number one priority all the time.

The names of birds were used for all fish labels. *Peacock* was the number one label, used for high-grade salmon, tuna and crab. *Seabird* was the label used for medium-grade fish. *Redbill* was used for lower grade fish. *Bluebill*, *Cardinal* and *Redbreast* were also used. Steelhead salmon was packed under *Papco* labels for medium-grade fish. All fish labels are now highly collectable and very valuable. Some are on display at the Columbia Maritime Museum in Astoria, Oregon.



It was not uncommon to see people commercial fishing with the aid of horses. Photo courtesy: Greater Astoria Historical Society

There arose a market for fancy Chinook Salmon in the New York, Boston and Chicago areas. Each year in January, Rogers would travel east to sell Point Adams salmon, tuna and crab through different brokerage companies.

In 1959, Point Adams entered a merchandise program through the WCBS radio station in New York. Alan Gray was the broker in charge of WCBS merchandising benefits and points of sales. He gave personal appearances and set up displays and ads in newspapers. This greatly boosted sales for Point Adams and kept the business thriving.

Expanded Offerings

In 1938, the appearance of albacore tuna excited Point Adams. They built tuna packing facilities that adjoined their salmon canneries. They had two lines of machinery,

pre-cookers and other needed equipment, including cooking and cooling rooms. Rogers hired an expert tuna man from California, Wallace Holland. In 1939, the first 40,000 cans of albacore tuna were packed. They produced up to 100 tons of tuna a day, on occasion. It was expensive to run, but it became a very profitable investment.

Pictured here is salmon labels used in Port Adams cannery. Photo courtesy: Columbia Maritime Museum

In 1948, Point Adams handled dungeness crab by acquiring a seafood plant in Newport. The crab was shipped to Hammond and canned there at the cannery. Point Adams had 200 employees by then, so it was able to handle the extra work.

By the late 1950s, there was an increasing need for supplementing the salmon. With the low spring run of salmon, the increasing dams being built and with increased pollution, Beard and Rogers had to look for a new source of supply.

Alaska had a Yukon run of King salmon. Point Adams eventually decided to buy a cannery in Alaska. Beard took a nucleus of trained staff north and set up and educated the staff in Alaska. This resulted in making the same, high-quality canned fish that Hammond produced. Thanks to the acquisition of the Alaska cannery and the training provided them by the Point Adams Cannery, the east coast market was saved.

This pioneer cannery basically survived the post-war depression of WWI, the stock market crash from the 1930's, and the economic struggles that other local canneries faced.

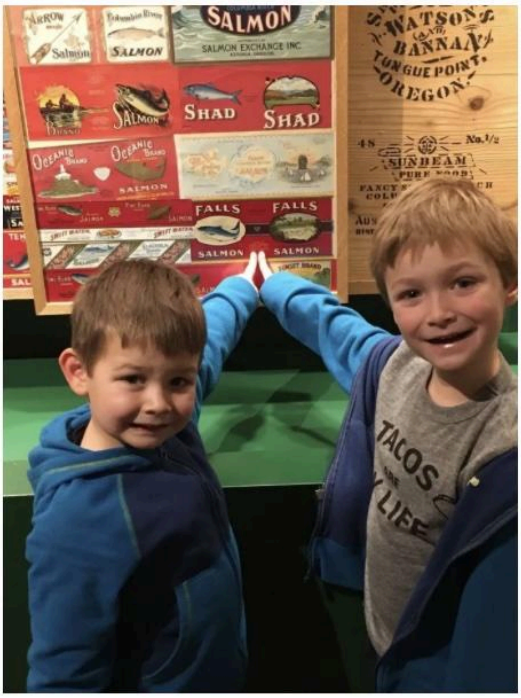
Adding on tuna in 1939 and crab in the 1940s also proved to be very lucrative moves by the Point Adams Packing Company.

Retiring from the Fisheries Business

After 43 years of continuous operation, Beard and Rogers decided to sell the operation and retire. The Westgate California Corporation became the new owners. Ownership changed hands two more times until the current owners took over: the California Incorporated Company from San Francisco. Tom Livy serves as the general manager and now processes imitation crab, lobster and other shellfish.

Thanks to that important conversation that was shared between Rogers and Beard on the train returning home from WWI, the dream grew into a life-long commitment as they worked together to build a solid business venture on the banks of the mighty Columbia River. Their cannery ran from 1920 to 1994 and provided many economic opportunities for many families.

I am very proud to say that Rogers was my grandfather, Nancy (Rogers) Bates was my mother, and Charles Rogers was my uncle. You can discover more about the cannery at both the Columbia Maritime Museum and the Greater Astoria Historical Society.



Great great grandsons of Lawrence Rogers stand in front of fish labels used in cannery. Photo courtesy: Columbia Maritime Museum

Article References:

Some information for this article was acquired from a video made in 1994 with Nancy Bates as narrator and producer of the video and David Bates, a brother, as the videographer.

Sources of writings and information came from: Lawrence Rogers, Charles Rogers, Tom Davidson, The Columbia Maritime Museum, The Clatsop County Historical Society with pictures by the “Pacific Northwest” and “Land of Many Dreams” taken by Suzi Rorbes. Also, “Oregon II” pictures by Ray Atkeson.

Some information also came from the Astoria High School Yearbook of 1914, and from Barbara Beard.